

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Carolyn Rigmaiden-Frank

COLLECTION: 4700.2551

IDENTIFICATION: Carolyn Rigmaiden-Frank is the daughter of Jacob Rigmaiden and niece of Josh Rigmaiden, two community leaders of Mossville. She grew up in the small African American Louisiana town.

INTERVIEWER: Chelsea Arseneault

SERIES: Mossville History Project - Field Interviews

INTERVIEW DATES: July 14, 2015 & August 11, 2015

FOCUS DATES: 1950s-1960s

ABSTRACT:

Tape 4486, Session I

Loved growing up in Mossville; names of parents and grandparents; father came from Mossville, mother from Merryville, Louisiana; Uncle Josh was minister; parents married in 1930; father worked at Firestone plant; strike at Firestone; father ministered to churches in Texas; being a minister's daughter; restrictions on teen activities like dances and hay rides due to church involvement; still regrets not being allowed to trick or treat at Halloween; father was worldly before becoming a minister; father always helped people in need; voting in Mossville; drivers paid twenty-five dollars to drive people to polls; father was protective of his daughters; father's involvement in politics; once had police watching house because death threat made to father; growth of Mossville and its subdivisions in mid 1950s; memories of grade school and teachers; Rigmaiden-Frank was on the honor roll and a majorette in high school; recently had fiftieth class reunion in Mossville; geographic boundaries of Mossville; family garden and chickens; disliked butchering chickens; memory of sister breaking arm while playing on swing, community's concern for her; community raised children; wasn't happy when population of Mossville increased in 1950s; had to lock doors and be more careful; influx of students from Vinton and Sulphur to Mossville High School; before Mossville High opened, Mossville kids went to Westlake and Lake Charles for schooling; difficulty for African American kids to get education; not being allowed to eat at Woolworth's lunch counter; wasn't involved in integration that much because "we were happy where we were"; her own children and granddaughter got good education at Lake Charles Boston High; granddaughter's school and work trajectory; Lake Charles High and Boston High combined after integration to become Lake Charles Boston High School; going crawfishing by the track; once a snake got on their crawfish lines and they ran home screaming; kids were satisfied with fewer material possessions in her childhood; memory of getting first TV set; party lines; memory of figuring out that Santa Claus wasn't real;

Carolyn's father was Jacob and her uncle was Josh; the town pool is named for her uncle Josh and the pavilion is named for her brother James; Uncle Josh was unofficial mayor of Mossville; after Josh's death, people of Mossville expected Jacob to fill his role; father didn't think girls belonged in politics; males ran things and females didn't; family discipline; Josh Rigmaiden would help people if they got into legal trouble; Rigmaidens helped people raise scholarship money for Mossville students; Rigmaidens got pool, school, recreation center built for community; describes physical appearance of her early memories of Mossville – few houses and gravel roads; birth order and ages of siblings; expansion of Mossville in 1950s; most people had simple weddings at home with cake and punch; family members who moved to California; father could pass for white; uncle who lived “two lives” -- as white in California, came home to Mossville and was black; skin color variations of family members; memory of Uncle Josh's enormous funeral; funerals could last for hours with many people talking; father Jacob also had large funeral; great-great-grandfather Luke Rigmaiden was a healer; her church believed in healing; Mossville full of faithful churchgoers; people would attend different churches to worship together.

Tape 4508, Session II

Father strongly supported voting; he drove people to register; important to honor right to vote since our older generation fought so hard for it; father organized drivers to take people to polls; during election times, had to leave phone free for father to take care of business; father influenced the votes of many in community; father negotiated scholarship money for local students; civil rights movement; Lake Charles has the Million Men March; Carolyn's mother died in 1965, her father remarried and moved to California; after he had a heart attack in 1964, he retired from Firestone and cut back on his community activities but continued his church work; father was ordained a minister in 1945 after he reformed from wilder lifestyle; father's conversion experience; parents told her little about their early lives; knows very little about her mother's family; Rigmaiden family originally from Germany or England; regrets not knowing more about family; father wanted Carolyn's brother to follow in his community leadership footsteps, but brother was a different type of person; wants her father's contributions to the community to be remembered; remembers how close-knit and safe the Mossville community was; description of house she lived in as a child; Mossville stores where they shopped; doesn't remember civil rights protests in Lake Charles, except for one Woolworth's lunch counter sit-in; was in Del Sprite junior sorority during high school; met her husband during school event in Lake Charles; initial reasons for liking her husband-to-be; dating; did accounting for Montgomery Ward for thirty-one years; worked at Lowe's for seven years; did accounting for the school board until retiring; Lowe's unequal treatment of female managers; parents instilled religious values and a strong work ethic; parents had a comfortable life, so she didn't realize how hard life can be; made sure to teach her own children that life isn't easy; lived very sheltered life in Mossville community; asserting her adulthood to her brother; after their mother died, older sister Ida May was like second mother; Ida May later moved to Philadelphia, but would frequently visit Mossville; Ida May liked to boss her around even after Carolyn was grown; wishes she'd recorded more information from the older generation; unmarried people don't quite fit in in Mossville; single women carry a stigma; no stigma for single men; double standard, even in church; mother made father's favorite meal – steak, gravy and rice – every day; fried chicken and roasts on Sundays; Daddy disliked pork and beans, potato salad and leftovers in general; Carolyn's favorites were fried foods; learned to cook early because she got tired of what her

mother cooked; mother made blackberry and peach cobblers, baked cakes from scratch; mother cooked enormous holiday meals for the family; mother didn't follow recipes; Ida May learned to cook by watching mother; father's regret that mother didn't teach Carolyn to cook before mother died; making popcorn balls for her children; memories of lavish holiday meals with family; mother did all the cooking herself; son and son-in-law compete to make best barbecue; Christmas and Thanksgiving were both big family holidays; didn't realize how much her mother held family together until she was gone; asking parents to buy her things; family almost fell apart after mother died, lack of closeness between siblings; sadness when school closed; people of Mossville struggled to get amenities like schools; attended the auction where Sasol bought the closed school; Mossville very special to people raised there; some of the people who moved in after Hurricane Audrey didn't like Mossville as much; crawfishing at railroad track; children played together in a group; when she moved away from Mossville, she missed the family atmosphere; Lake Charles wasn't so close-knit; people helped each other in Mossville; doesn't understand why those who haven't sold to plants haven't, because who would want to live here now?; uncertainty about whether she'll still have access to family cemetery now that Sasol bought land; she hasn't visited to tend graves for years; doesn't know if area will still be called Mossville; always expected to come back and live in Mossville, but husband and children didn't want to; importance of good teachers; teachers liked teaching at the Mossville school; the community was full of good mentors; Mossville will be greatly missed; sad that her grandchildren know so little about Mossville; sad she won't be able to show next generation where she grew up; she was the only child in her family born in a hospital, the rest were born at home in Mossville; no matter where she goes, Mossville will be home.

TAPES: 2 (T4486, 4508)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 3 hours, 17 minutes

T4486 (Session I) 85 minutes

T4508 (Session II) 112 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 96 pages, total

T4486 (Session I) 47 pages

T4508 (Session II) 49 pages

PHOTOGRAPHS / PHOTOGRAPHER: Two photographs taken during interview at the Rigmaiden Recreational Center in Mossville, Louisiana. Photographer Charlotte Willcox.

OTHER MATERIALS: Correspondence; Interview questions (7 pgs)

RESTRICTIONS: none